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THE ROLE OF ESL  
IN A DUAL LANGUAGE PROGRAM

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**Abstract**

This article paints a portrait of Inter-American Magnet School in Chicago and the role of the ESL program within the school. Inter-American Magnet School was founded 21 years ago by two parents who wanted their own children to be educated in a Spanish bilingual, bicultural program that welcomed children of all backgrounds. The school now serves 630 children in a kindergarten through eighth grade program. The school's Latino, African-American, and European-American students learn together in Spanish and English in a setting that fosters literacy and fluency in two languages, high academic achievement, and multicultural pride and tolerance. English is one of the two second languages that students & learning in the school, and is taught both in the classrooms and in a pull-out program.

What is the role of English as a second language in a dual language immersion program? In the 1993-94 school year, a full time ESL program was established at Inter-American Magnet School, a highly acclaimed Spanish-English dual language program which is a public school located on the north side of Chicago. Although ESL had been offered part time in the past, and also within the regular bilingual classrooms, teachers expressed a need that year for a full time pull-out program to serve the potentially English proficient (PEP) students in their classrooms. It is important to understand the goals of dual language

immersion programs (also called developmental bilingual education -- DBE) and of Inter-American Magnet School to understand the context in which ESL is taught in such a program. I will discuss the program in general and then describe the ESL component.

### **Dual Language Immersion or Developmental Bilingual Education**

Dual language immersion programs are those in which two languages - English and a second language - are used as the basis of instruction. Subject matter is taught in both languages in classrooms composed of both native English speakers and native speakers of the second language of instruction.

Developmental bilingual education programs are designed to achieve a number of objectives. Their aim is for students to become fluent and literate in two languages, reach high levels of academic achievement, and develop positive attitudes toward each other's cultural group. Since students interact with peers who speak the other language on a daily basis, they come to appreciate one another and develop positive social values and behaviors.

### **The Founding of Inter-American Magnet School**

Inter-American Magnet School was founded in 1975 by two parents, Adela Coronado-Greeley and Janet Nolan, who wanted their own children to become proficient in two languages and to experience two cultures. Together they drew up a proposal for the Chicago Public Schools, and the school was first launched from bilingual funds as a school for Hispanics. In 1978, with support from Access to Excellence, a program designed to further integration, it instituted a policy that created a student population half Spanish-speaking and half English-speaking. Since the school was founded, Adela Coronado-Greeley and Janet Nolan guided and nurtured the school. The school has been in the lead as a model of a dual-language immersion program, as a place for Hispanic and non-Hispanic students to thrive and excel, and as an example of school reform in the midst of the Chicago school reform movement.

In 1993, Adela Coronado-Greeley was named Illinois State Teacher of the Year. Her leadership at Inter-American, her advocacy for bilingual and multicultural education, and her many years as a

superlative third grade teacher contributed to the winning of this honor. As a result of winning this honor, Adela spent the second half of the school year traveling throughout the state of Illinois, observing and speaking at schools. She spent another year on a sabbatical. She was also a founding member of an educational reform group in Chicago, Parents United for Reform in Education (PURE), that helped to put decision making in Chicago Public Schools in the hands of local school councils, composed of parents, community members, teachers and principals. She was also selected to serve on the Chicago School Board for two years by the mayor of Chicago.

Janet Nolan, the co-founder of Inter-American, is another leader in the field of bilingual education in Chicago. She works in the Chicago Public School's Department of Multicultural Education, and provides inservices to bilingual teachers all over the city. She coordinated a book, "Dual Language Immersion Program Models" which was based upon the experience of Inter-American and two other schools in Chicago. It describes the philosophy, goals, and teaching methodologies used in dual language programs. She has also spearheaded efforts to establish and support other dual language programs in the Chicago Public Schools. Currently there are twelve dual language programs in existence in the Chicago schools.

While Janet Nolan was still at Inter-American, she established the school's Curriculum of the Americas, which determines the social studies focus and general theme for each grade level. Kindergarten students learn about families around the world, first graders study Native Americans, second graders study the Caribbean, third graders learn about the Incas, fourth graders focus upon Native American regions and cultures, and fifth graders examine the geography of the Americas. Sixth through eighth grade students study ancient history in Europe and the history of the United States, while also reading literature in Spanish and English from Latin America, Spain, and around the world.

The program at Inter-American began as a pre-school and added one grade at a time as parents went back again and again to the Chicago Board of Education to demand that the program be continued and expanded. Inter-American began as two classrooms within another school, grew and moved into other classrooms in another school, and finally moved into its own building in 1983. The school now has four

pre-school classes, and three classes for each grade, kindergarten through eighth.

### **Students at Inter-American Magnet School**

Inter-American currently serves 635 students, and its population is 66% Hispanic, 20% white, 13% African-American, and 1% Native Americans and other minorities. Hundreds of parents apply to send their children there each year, and the children are chosen by a lottery system which is a component of the Chicago Public Schools' voluntary desegregation program. Students from almost every country in Latin America attend the school.

The school does not select students for its program based on academic achievement or test scores. Sixty percent of the students are classified below the poverty line. Students routinely score above the national average on standardized tests in both English and Spanish. Students have won many prizes in district-wide contests in Spanish as well as "Young Authors," a state-wide writing contest. Two students (a brother and sister) won a city-wide essay contest sponsored by British Airways, which rewarded them with a trip to London.

### **The Principal and Teachers: Key Players and Leaders**

The principal and teachers at the school are almost all bilingual in English and Spanish, and have been widely recognized for their innovative approaches to curriculum and multicultural teaching. Many of them lead workshops throughout the city on various aspects of bilingual education, cooperative learning and whole language learning.

Adela Coronado-Greeley is not the only teacher recognized for her excellence in teaching at the school. Other teachers have received the Golden Apple Award (granted by the Chicago Foundation on Excellence), and have been recognized as Chicago Bilingual Teachers of the Year. Many teachers write and receive grant money for special projects which they have proposed, which have included such topics as *Native Americans: More than Tipis and Head Dress Feathers*, *Saving Lake Michigan*, and *Time is Money*. Four years ago, parents and teachers instituted a bilingual Family Math Program in which parents, teachers and students came together for four evenings to play math learning

games. A similar program, Family Science Night was conducted last year.

The special project, *Native Americans: More than Tipis and Head Dress Feathers*, was carried out by a first grade teacher, as part of the school's Curriculum of the Americas. In order to let students go beyond stereotypes of Native Americans that are perpetuated in popular culture, the students learned about Native Americans of the Midwest and engaged in many hands-on activities. Students visited the Chicago Museum of Natural History where they viewed a Pawnee lodge. They went to a local nature center in the spring and participated in the gathering of maple syrup. They made many crafts, including corn husk dolls, God's eyes, baskets, and totem poles.

Over and over again, teachers have proposed changes in the school curriculum, policy, and structure as they evaluate the school program and attempt to improve it. At the teachers' suggestion, and with approval of their local school council, money was procured to hire additional teachers in order to lower class size to twenty students. Teachers instituted a policy to include alternative assessment of their students and to decrease the number of standardized tests given at the school. An alternative to standardized grading and report cards was adopted this year in grades 1-3. A longer school day was also put into effect because teachers argued that the 9-2:30 school day which is the standard for the Chicago Public Schools was too rushed and not educationally sound. As part of this re-structured school day, a time for meeting and in-service has been incorporated into the weekly schedule.

### **Parent and Community Involvement: Central from the Start**

Parent involvement and community support has always been the cornerstone of the school's operation. All meetings are held in both Spanish and English, and all notices that go home are in both languages. Parent volunteers are welcomed into the classrooms, and dozens of parents come to the school on a regular basis. An active parent wrote a grant so that students could be trained to mediate as conflict managers in disputes between students. Several years ago, a parent volunteer coordinator was hired as a means of coordinating the participation of parents in the school, and parents were invited into their children's

classrooms to speak about their jobs. Parents and community members raised money several years ago to build a playground on the school lot. Six parents sit on the 11 member Local School Council, and make important policy and fiscal decisions for the school.

### **The Classroom Setting**

It has been estimated that of the Hispanic children who enter the school at the pre-school level, approximately one third are potentially English proficient (PEP), one third are bilingual in Spanish and English, and one third are English dominant. For many years, the program was taught 50% in Spanish and 50% in English (alternating days and teachers). However, it was felt that this proportion of language instruction did not develop students who were truly proficient in Spanish because of societal pressures to function in English, and the low status accorded to the Spanish language in our culture. Therefore, the proportion of Spanish was increased to 80% in pre-school through third grade, and a 50-50 ratio of the two languages was maintained in fourth through eighth grade. Teachers feel that this change has meant a greater proficiency in Spanish for many students, while they continue to achieve proficiency in English.

The majority of students who enter as PEP students have made great progress in both Spanish and English by the time they are in second grade. According to Jim Cummins, the Canadian bilingual scholar, it takes four to seven years to develop academic language skills to become truly proficient in two languages. (Hence the name, "developmental bilingual education.") Students at Inter-American are grouped according to their first and second languages from the start. They have reading readiness and also reading instruction in their first language, while learning either Spanish or English as their second language. This takes up two language arts periods. For the rest of the day, the children learn math, social studies, and science in either Spanish or English. In this program there are two second languages: Spanish and English. Both are given equal social status and importance in the school.

A typical day for first grade PEP children, for example, is as follows: First thing in the morning students have one hour of Spanish reading and language arts followed by one hour of ESL instruction. In

first grade, ESL is offered by one of the regular classroom teachers. For these two classes students are grouped by language dominance. For the rest of the day, students are grouped heterogeneously - PEP children mixed with monolingual English and bilingual students. These heterogeneous groups share a 50 minute lunch and recess period, after which they have mathematics, science and social studies classes in Spanish. The afternoon classes are taught using cooperative learning techniques and sheltered instruction to enable the students to work together and learn both the subject matter and language from one another. PEP students have a very important role in the success of the program as they assist the monolingual English students while they themselves are learning the content areas in Spanish. Students receive instruction in gym, music, library, and art once a week.

A typical day for monolingual English children in first grade is similar, with the major difference being the morning language arts classes. The monolingual English children have one hour of Spanish as a second language, followed by one hour of English language arts. For the remainder of the day, they are together with the PEP children and receive all the content area instruction together.

### **ESL at Inter-American Magnet**

Approximately forty students have been served in the ESL program each year. Although it is true that the majority of PEP students in the program are able to master English after several years, some students need more time to develop this language proficiency. Some students need additional time to master Spanish literacy skills and to establish a firm basis in their native language before they can transfer these academic and reading skills to English. In the ESL class, these students need both communication skills and literacy skills in English, and students receive instruction which helps them to make the bridge into English literacy.

Most students served by the ESL program are recent immigrants from Latin America who have come into the school anywhere from second to eighth grade. They need additional support in order to learn English that will enable them to participate in their regular bilingual classrooms. The object is for them to be able to succeed in both English

language arts classes as well as subject matter (in social studies, science or math) that is taught in English.

As a grade 2-8 ESL pull-out teacher, I am using a variety of approaches to teach ESL students who are at different levels of proficiency and in different grades. I have tried to make my curriculum literature-based in the past year, and use many nursery rhymes, poems, fairy tales, and simple books to create lessons. Basic vocabulary, TPR, games, conversations and dialogues are used with beginning ESL students. Students learn many songs in the class. Simple but interesting stories, reading and vocabulary exercises, and discussions and stories dictated by students themselves are used with intermediate or advanced students. Over half of the students are involved with journal writing. Students have created books and projects based on stories they have read or been read to. Other students have been helped with social studies materials they are using in English.

I choose literature for the ESL classes based on simplicity, repetitive vocabulary, and high-interest stories. One of the lessons for younger students this year centered around the fable, *The Gingerbread Man*. After reading the big book version to the class, the class did a choral reading with me of the refrain of the book: "Run, run, as fast as you can, you can't catch me, I'm the Gingerbread Man". Students made gingerbread puppets on a stick, and acted out the entire story, using their puppets to say the refrain (short play versions of many fairy tales are contained in the resource book, *ESL Teacher's Activities Kit*, by Elizabeth Claire, published by Prentice Hall). Students made a book of the story and illustrated it. Finally, I brought gingerbread man cookies to class and the students decorated and ate them.

A book I used with beginning and intermediate students older was Joanna Cole's *The Magic School Bus Lost in Outer Space*. There are a number of popular books in this series which deal with science topics - a cartoon version of the books was made into a series for educational television. We read the big book version in class, and students also had individual copies of the book. I had copies of the book in Spanish for students to read at home. The book has dialogue, narrative, and expository sections, and we looked at each part and how they fit together. We focused first on the dialogue section, where students put "post-em" notes over the bubbles and re-wrote their own dialogue. I

brought in numerous books about outer space, and students created their own book of "Questions About Outer Space" with envelopes in which the answer was placed on an index card.

With intermediate students in 5-8 grades I used several novels that had a 2-4 grade reading level. These included *Sarah Plain and Tall*, *Sadako and 1000 Paper Cranes*, and *The Big Lie*. I alternatively read these books aloud to students and discussed them, and also let the students read work together on a number of chapters by themselves in literature circles. For projects, I had students take a chapter and illustrate it, write letters to characters in the books, and make radio plays of sections of the books. These books provided us with many vocabulary words and grammar structures which we studied.

For a number of years there has been a discussion of offering ESL to parents at the school. For several months I was teaching students and their mothers together, which was a very interesting class; however, these mothers are some of our most regular volunteers, and are now helping teachers in their children's classrooms. The promotion of a special class for adults or children and adults is needed to make this a success. The increased involvement of PEP parents in the school might be enhanced by these classes. There have been frequent suggestions to offer Spanish classes to monolingual English adults also. This would enable these parents to better support their children's studies at home and to communicate with the Spanish speaking parents. Although there is a low turnover rate for students at the school, some of the turnover that does take place is undoubtedly due to the difficulty that some students face with Spanish without parental support for that language at home. Both adult ESL and Spanish classes would benefit the school - if time and resources were available.

### **Questions on the Road to Improvement**

One question which the school's faculty has pursued has been the way in which African American students might best be served in the context of Inter-American's program. The school's philosophy stresses the importance of multicultural understanding and tolerance, but disciplinary problems that arise seem to fall disproportionately upon African American students. The staff has discussed similarities and

differences between Hispanic and African American cultures, learning styles, and values. A suggestion to place more stress on the connection between African and Caribbean history and culture has been made. Another suggestion which would support all monolingual English parents in the school has been to start a support group for these parents to discuss ways to help them work with their children in Spanish and English.

### **Critical Comments**

Inter-American uses most of its discretionary funds to hire teachers in order to lower class size. The school is committed to this policy as a means of personalizing learning for students and increasing student achievement. However, funds for materials for social studies and English and Spanish language arts are therefore in short supply. Materials for the hands-on science and math programs have been given a priority, and also computers for each classroom (as well as the computer laboratory). But at this point, all classes do not yet have computers and there is no system for computer networking within the school.

One of the problems which has arisen specifically with the ESL program is the fact that Inter-American is very short on administrative support, so I have been called on to take care of district requirements for the bilingual program: identification and testing of new bilingual students, the running of a bilingual parent advisory council, and end-of-the-year testing of bilingual students. This means that ESL classes are held from October-May, and that students don't receive services all year. Regular classroom teachers need support and resources to offer ESL in their own classrooms when the pull-out program is not offered.

Another general problem has been a change in the 1995-96 leadership of the Chicago Public Schools: the former Chicago Board of Education has been dissolved, and the schools have been placed under a management team appointed by the mayor. Under the former Board, Janet Nolan was expanding the dual language schools in the Chicago system and giving them support in the areas of teacher training and program implementation. Although Janet remains in this position, it is clear that the new leadership of the schools does not share the commitment of the former Board of Education to bilingual education

and dual language programs in particular. This comes at a time of many new "English-Only" initiatives and a conservative Illinois legislature that is not committed to adequate funding of existing programs in the state. A number of Illinois legislators have been quite vocal in their opposition to the Chicago schools and bilingual education. Inter-American has always been involved in fighting against anti-bilingual and anti-immigrant currents, and it will no doubt have to continue to do so.

### **Summary**

The key to Inter-American's success has included strong parental support, an innovative educational program provided by a bilingual staff, and a commitment of all to a dual immersion bilingual model which serves students of all races and economic levels. At Inter-American, both Spanish and English are held in high esteem. English is only one of two second languages taught. Language skills that students bring to the school are seen as resources to be utilized and developed. Both native speakers of English and native speakers of Spanish benefit by learning two languages. And unlike a traditional transitional bilingual program, Spanish-dominant children are encouraged to continue the development of their native language, and reach high levels of proficiency in both languages. Native English speakers are prepared to participate in our increasingly multicultural and multilingual society.